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"The Most Coevolutionary Animal of Them All": Turning "esoteric" biological theory into lessons for humanity's survival in the 1970s & 1980s

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In 1984, American ecologist Daniel Janzen was awarded the first Crafoord Prize in biology by the Swedish Royal Academy of Sciences for "his imaginative and stimulating studies on coevolution between plants and animals." Speaking at the prize ceremony, Janzen opened with his iconic research, but his lecture quickly took an unexpected turn, focusing on the human—in his words, "the most coevolutionary animal of them all."

Dr. Mason Dentinger's larger project reconstructs the history of coevolutionary theory from the 1940s onward and how the Cold War and human chemical warfare against insect pests provided the pivotal contexts for its development: Coevolutionary theorists drew on conceptions of human agency to construct an understanding of nonhuman—plant and animal—agency. In this talk, Dr. Mason Dentinger explores how Janzen and his contemporaries in the 1970s and 1980s brought coevolution full circle, back into the sphere of human technological manipulation of the environment in the late twentieth century.